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PROTECTIVE TARIFF ON COFFEE

Mr. Bruner Criticized and His Critic
Answered by Mr. Louisson.

MR. BRUNER CRITICIZED.

(Retail Merchant, Dallas, Texas, October, 1907.)

Mr. Bruner of Hawaii in the September issue of the Tea and Coffee Trade Journal, makes a very strong and eloquent plea for a tariff on coffee. In the beginning, he uses sugar, with its protective tariff, as a basis of his argument as to why the same, or an equivalent tariff, should be placed on coffee. It is by no means a settled fact that the protection afforded the sugar barons of American, who now use from seven to nine figures to enumerate their fortunes, that this is a good thing for the mass of American people. Is it a fact that the South where all of the sugar is raised and manufactured, is practically benefited by this protective tariff? Is it not a fact that with the exception of a very few skilled laborers and managers of refineries, who receive fair salaries for their skilled labor, that this industry is handled by the cheapest labor to be had in this country? Is it a fact that the actual producers are in any manner recipients of the benefits of this enormous tax imposed upon our people? I do not believe that an investigation of the conditions that exists here would warrant any fair-minded man in placing himself on record as being in favor of a protective tariff on sugar, and it is also a fact easily susceptible of demonstration, that this protective tariff was secured at the hands of Congress by the richest and most powerful lobby that ever visited the halls of Congress. And at this late date, after many years trial of sugar tariff, I can see no good resulting from it to the masses of the people. If we confine ourselves to class legislation, and taxing of the many for the benefit of the few, then the protective tariff is a good thing. I have always contended that America should be for Americans, and that in its broadest sense, not confined to the millionaire classes. Mr. Bruner also refers to the Dingley bill, which was passed in 1897. He is correct when he says this is merely a manufacturers' bill, and the great consuming public of the United States is suffering today from the effects of this iniquitous bill. It has fostered and protected the so-called infant industries of the United States until they have become enormous giants who openly defy our laws, practically control every legislature in the Union, and render it absolutely impossible to pass any bill in Congress not endorsed by them, who ship goods into foreign markets, and compete with the cheapest labor in the world, sell American manufactured goods in China at prices that would bankrupt the cheapest Chinese labor, and tax the people at home to carry on this campaign in foreign lands. Our government, with its protective tariff, forces the taxpayers of this country to support these giants in their conquest of commerce. These facts apply to a protective tariff in general. Now we'll apply ourselves to the particular tariff asked for by Mr. Bruner. In the first place, it would not appear to be good business policy for eighty or ninety million people, who do not produce a single pound of coffee, to place a tariff upon it. It is true that it is entirely within the range of possibility, for some of our tropical possessions to produce the article, but according to Mr. Bruner's own statement in regard to the production of coffee in the Hawaii Islands, that they have been growing coffee since 1825, and that, too, a great portion of the time with six cents per pound protective tariff; that in 1906 Hawaii produced from twenty-four to thirty thousand bags worth perhaps \$250,000 to \$300,000, or a little less than one day's supply for the United States. I think that after cultivating coffee for over eighty years, and then not being able to produce with protective tariff and all, more than a day's supply for our people, it would be hardly worth while for the people of the United States to place this enormous burden upon themselves.

Labor, another feature of the coffee production in Hawaii, is the labor question. From the best advice I am able to obtain, the lands of Hawaii lay idle because of insufficient labor to till them. It is of quite recent occurrence that sugar planter's and others drew heavily upon Japan for cheap labor. While the United States, with its unlimited wealth and inexhaustible resources, might, with a high protective tariff, continued appropriations of money, energy and men, develop Hawaii's coffee industry, it would hardly seem that the end would justify the means. According to best statistics, the United States uses more than one-half of the world's production of coffee, which would make something like ten or twelve million bags, or in other words, Mr. Bruner's tax would mean to the consumers of the United States the enormous sum of three hundred million dollars annually. I hardly think Congress would dare place this burden upon its constituency. It is worse than useless for Mr. Bruner to dodge the issue, as he evidently tries to do in dividing this burden upon the people of this country, in which he finally arrives at the conclusion that the amount of thirty-six cents per capita per year would pay this tariff. He could have obtained much smaller figures by dividing it up over each cup of coffee drank over the breakfast table. The fact stands out, in bold relief, that the entire year's production of Hawaii, for which he asks protective tariff, would not amount to 10 per cent of the amount of this tariff. It is also useless for him to argue that a portion of this would come out of the importers and roasters' profits. The fact remains

the same, the consuming public of the United States must pay the tariff. If there ever was an argument to justify a protective tariff, the one advanced by the Republican party, that our industries were not able to compete with those of foreign countries, is certainly the soundest argument ever made, the one which now bears not a semblance of truth, as it has been amply proven, that the people of this country are fully capable of competing with any nation on earth, regardless of cheap labor, perfect machinery, or any existing conditions. If we are to deal with a protective tariff at all, let's remove it from every article imported from countries that will make reciprocity agreements with the United States.

CHAPMAN THOMAS.

MR. LOUISSON'S REPLY.

(Retail Merchant, Dallas, Texas, December, 1907.)

Hawaii, November 10th, 1907.
Editor The Retail Merchant, Dallas, Texas.

Sir: Your paper of October publishes a specially written article by the pen of Mr. Chapman Thomas, entitled "Protective Tariff on Coffee," in which he attacks the plea and arguments of Mr. Bruner, for protection to coffee under the American flag, and that appeared in the September number of the Tea and Coffee Trade Journal of New York.

Our friend Mr. Thomas is woefully shy on statistical consumption of coffee in the United States, and he therefore makes a most appalling blunder, when stating that if a small protective duty of three cents a pound were imposed upon the product, the nation would be taxed \$300,000,000 annually. He needs to be corrected on this point, and many others, that he has brought into the subject, in order not to beguile the issue. The American tropical territories require this measure, also more of them, to become prosperous, happy and contented members of the great American commonwealth, of which we are a part. He also rings in the trust question, and that of great industrial combinations, also alien to the subject under discussion.

The coffee tariff issue belongs to that class, as pertain to tillers of the soil, and what goes to make the backbone of every country, and community, such as wheat, oats, corn, cotton growing, etc., etc. In such staples and products no trusts can ever be formed or maintained successfully, by the tillers of the soil.

The trusts, on the other hand, are found in all lines of manufactured productions, and especially in such raw products that require immense capital to establish initial operations. In this category he will please delegate his trust theories.

As to the consumption of coffee in the United States, at the present time, it runs about one billion pounds annually. A tariff of three cents a pound would mean \$30,000,000—just one-tenth of the sum as was heralded forth by our good American friend of American territories.

Furthermore, he criticizes Hawaii for not having produced more coffee than she is doing, owing to the fact that when existing as an independent entity she enjoyed a protection of six cents a pound, on the home grown product.

In explanation will state that the home consumption is small, probably not exceeding 300,000 pounds, while our production has in the past reached 3,000,000 pounds annually.

Any business man, or in fact any one conversant with economic conditions and laws, will perceive at a glance that excess of production over home or local consumption is of no avail in promoting growth of any product. The surplus, no matter how large or small, has to be exported to foreign markets, in open competition with the production of the world.

As it happens for the last ten years the coffee markets of the world have been in a most deplorable condition, never in its history has there been such an enormous over-production. Brazil is the sole disturbing factor of the situation. Certainly with such facts before us, the American coffee growers are up against it, and more so from another fact that the United States permits the free entry of all coffee grown in all foreign countries, to enter her markets free of duty. With such conditions facing us, no growth, no headway, can be attained.

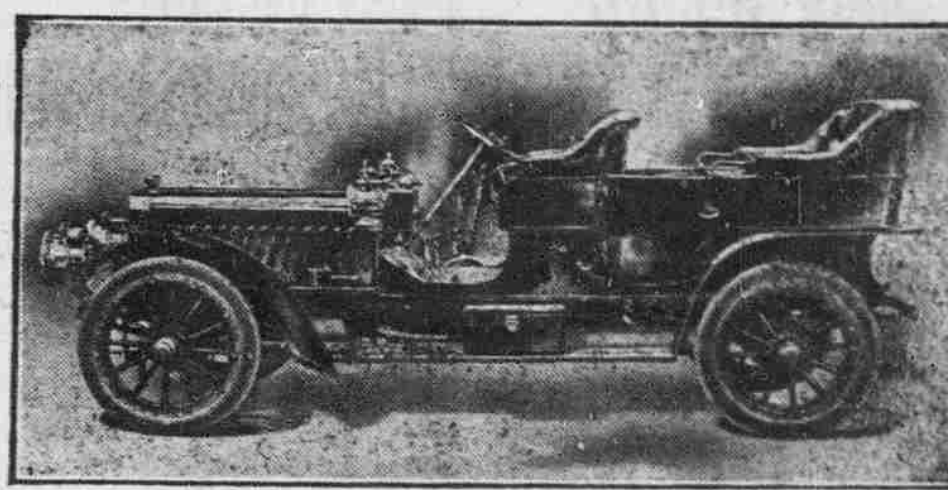
Our friend talks on reciprocity, and favors and believes in it. Why not go one step further, and advocate free trade, as we have in coffee? It might be a panacea for all of our industrial ills? Surely it will be a case where the medicine is more fatal than the disease.

As to the trust issue which Mr. Thomas touches on along with his argument, it must be conceded that it is the burning question of the day, at least the regulation of them, in their methods of doing business. One can not absolutely concede that the tariff is responsible for the abuses of the trusts. The primary infection originated with the rebate system, on freights. From this step on, others followed that were merely subsidiary.

Protection to coffee means protection to the tiller of the soil. We shall never see spring up from out of its loins such monsters as threaten the economic weal. Would respectfully refer readers to the article that appeared in the North American Review of January, 1906, by ex-Governor Beckman Winthrop of Porto Rico, entitled, "Industrial Progress in Porto Rico." In that article we are given a clear and precise picture of the coffee industry, verified by figures as taken from the census of 1899. Is this not convincing?

Mr. Thomas seems also to deplore

(Continued on Page Six.)



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